

Initiating a Proactive Public Relations Strategy

Tetovo, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Background

Citizens in the City of Tetovo (population 200,000) lacked information about the role of local government and public utilities. Previously, the media were an arm of the government, and journalists reported stories they were told to report. Good citizen and media relations were not considered responsibilities of local government officials. Municipal staff faced a challenge in providing services in an independent media environment.

The Tetovo Communal, which acts as the city's public works department, was receiving negative coverage from the media. The Tetovo Communal is a nationally chartered urban services provider soon to fall under municipal jurisdiction. It is accountable to city government and provides water, garbage pickup, and park and road maintenance services. The Communal had never issued a press release except to convey negative information, such as when water was to be cut off for repairs. There was no coordinated system for citizen communication with the utility company, and contact phone numbers were never published. These conditions motivated the Tetovo Communal to address media and citizen relations, hoping to communicate current and accurate information to citizens, improve media relations, increase citizen understanding of the role of public utilities and local government, and involve all employees in taking responsibility for media and citizen relations.

Innovation

In June 1996 the Tetovo Communal initiated a proactive media and public relations strategy. Press releases were issued on topics such as maintenance and construction alerts, development accomplishments, and equipment acquisitions. The Communal discussed strategies for promoting media coverage of its activities, such as developing relationships with reporters and editors, creating photo-opportunities, and staging dedications for completed projects. The Communal is designing public education campaigns concerning water conservation and anti-litter programs and is including flyers describing Communal services and phone numbers with water bills to educate the public.

Results

The cost of a public relations and media strategy is minimal, requiring only the cost of staff time and printing of flyers and other educational materials. The Tetovo strategy has been implemented only recently, so impacts are not yet available. The Communal hopes that the innovation will generate better community relations for the utility, increase the responsibility of each worker, and make local government decision-making more transparent.

Summary

The Tetovo Communal has begun to undertake innovations to improve its media and public relations. It decided to issue press releases on topics such as maintenance and construction alerts, development accomplishments, and equipment acquisitions. The Communal will also promote media coverage of its activities and implement public education campaigns concerning water conservation and anti-litter programs.

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